

*Harmony*TM

FORUM OF THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA INSTITUTE
NUMBER 12 • APRIL 2001

Organization Change: New Institute Web Site Program



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Organization Change

The mission of the Symphony Orchestra Institute is to improve the effectiveness of symphony orchestra organizations by fostering positive change in how they function as organizations.

As the Institute's efforts have progressed, it has become clear that we do not need "to reinvent the wheel." Progressive industrial and nonprofit organizations have been changing how they function in dramatic and quite positive ways for some time. Business and nonprofit organizations outside the symphony world have been significantly altered, or even created from scratch, to function in ways that the Institute imagined should be possible for symphony organizations.

Further, advances in how organizations can better function are rooted in a long line of academic theory, research, and observation by organizational psychologists whose accumulated knowledge provides a framework for practitioners.

So the task for those interested in healthier, more fulfilling, and expansive symphony organizations is to determine how best to apply to these unique and complex organizations the theories and practices many others have already discovered and developed.

Approach

In our communications program, primarily through pages in *Harmony*, the Institute has promoted greater insight into the need for and possibilities of institutional change through the voices of individuals or groups in the form of essays, reports, roundtable interviews, and other formats. We believe that *Harmony* content has been useful to the field, as was confirmed in our recent Symphony Organization Participant Survey, and it will continue to be a central component of our communications effort.

Also, in our field work within symphony organizations and with various groups of symphony industry participants, we continue to have the objective of developing methodologies which we can propagate broadly in various forms, to help accelerate sound and sustainable change.

To supplement these efforts, we have decided to utilize the expanding capabilities of the Internet and our Web site, and, in our first endeavor, to advance the knowledge of symphony organization participants rather directly about “organization change.” Indeed, by use of the Internet, the Institute is embarking on a new educational journey and hopes to bring along on this venture a growing number of *Harmony* readers and Institute supporters.

As some readers already know, our journey will unfold on our Web site in installments, like chapters in a book or a series of classroom sessions. We also recognize that most people in our audience are very busy, and we know we must be reasonably short and to the point with our material. Therefore, we will usually indicate the approximate reading time as we post new material. Generally, we will alert readers to new material through our Key Notes bulletin (see inside back cover). We will also store on our Web site and index prior material for new students, or for those who may have missed some installments. We will present a general orientation or survey of the field of organization change and will provide recommended readings for those who wish to pursue the subject more deeply. As often as possible, we will list recommended readings that can be accessed through Internet links.

As presented later in this report, the organization change material posted cumulatively on our Web site will be summarized in *Harmony*, or other printed form, for those readers who do not have Internet access or who wish to have their learning refreshed in print.

Authorship

We are fortunate to have Laura Leigh Roelofs as the principal author and educational leader of our survey of organization change. Laura is assistant concertmaster of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra and a candidate for a master’s degree in organization change at American University/National Training Laboratories. She will be assisted in her presentations by Institute and *Harmony* staff and by outside advisors. We thank Laura for this wonderful pro bono contribution to the Institute’s communications program.

Introduction

By now, we suspect many readers are asking, “But exactly what does ‘organization change’ mean?” The answers to this question will, of course, be at the heart of our educational program, and as we progress, we will link these answers to symphony organizations. But to help take the first step in this journey, and to give all those coming along a sense of direction, we have adopted the following preliminary definition:

Organization change involves a concerted, planned effort to increase organizational effectiveness and health through changes in the organization’s dynamics using behavioral science knowledge.

As will be evident later in our presentations, various words and phrases have been coined to encompass the organizational phenomena we are going to study. However, since the Institute's mission is to foster "positive change" in symphony organizational functioning, we concluded that "organization change" was the simplest and most direct phrase for us to employ as our study commenced.

General Syllabus

In the course of our Web-site review of organization change, we envision the following syllabus:

- ◆ The historical development of the discipline: surveying the names, dates, and main ideas and contributions of prominent thinkers and doers in this field.
- ◆ A more in-depth exploration of some of the main concepts of organization change theory and practice, including a glossary of terms, definitions, and ideas.
- ◆ A review of how organization change practices have been carried out in industrial, commercial, and nonprofit organizations, and the application of organization change concepts and terms.
- ◆ A consideration of how organization change practices are being applied, and might be applied more broadly, to symphony orchestra organizations.

Feedback

The Institute welcomes feedback about our organization change educational effort and will likely publish comments, questions, and other feedback which we believe will contribute to the effort.

Early Content

Now, starting at the top of the next page, let's turn to the content which has been posted to date on the Organization Change pages of our Web site. As noted in the syllabus, our survey begins with the historical development of the organization change discipline, with a review of its roots and subsequent development. As of this *Harmony* issue's press date, we are in the midst of that review.

Organization Change

Roots

The roots of organization change began to grow almost a century ago, when social scientists and business writers first tried to address the human-organizational conflicts beginning to emerge in a developing industrial society.

After the Industrial Revolution, large business enterprises increasingly dominated the working lives of Americans; by the middle of the 20th century, they were a defining feature of U.S. culture. Hierarchically structured corporations categorized employees neatly into power levels. They also required people to perform as well-oiled parts, subjugating individuality to the good of the whole. Machines became not only the instruments of economic progress, but a metaphor for how organizations should operate.

This metaphor was quickly translated into theory. Starting in the 1880s, Frederick Taylor developed a method of “scientific management” that even today influences work design. The method involves dividing tasks into the smallest possible units and enforcing strict performance specifications for each employee. One historian writes: “The productivity gains were enormous . . . [but] living inside a machine ultimately leads to deep, inbred malaise and resentment, a thorough atrophy of creativity, and the propensity to sabotage” (Kleiner 66).

During the early years of the 20th century, the social sciences began to emerge as recognized disciplines engaging in quantitative and qualitative research. Sociologists and psychologists began to study the “human element” in groups and organizations. During the 1920s, Mary Parker Follett’s visionary work on authority relationships anticipated later theories of participative management and conflict resolution.

At about the same time, between 1924 and 1932, a groundbreaking series of studies took place at the Hawthorne Electric works in Chicago. Conducted by Fritz Roethlisberger and others under the direction of Elton Mayo, these studies established a new understanding of the effect of social relationships on productivity. Mayo’s book on the Hawthorne Studies has been cited as “the first major call for a human relations movement” (Shafritz & Ott 10).

In the 1930s and into the 1940s, a growing body of literature explored organizational behavior, human motivation, leadership, and the effect of organization structure on individuals. Perhaps the most influential figure during this period was psychologist Kurt Lewin, who is widely considered the “grandfather” of organization change. Lewin’s theories integrated individual, organization, and environment, proposing that none could be understood without reference to the others. His “Action Research Model” provided the first practical application of theory to organization change processes, and this model became the basis for many subsequent theories and applications. In the last few years

of his life, between 1944 and 1947, Lewin launched two innovative research organizations:

- ◆ The Commission on Community Interrelations, organized to investigate group dynamics, especially in the context of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity.
- ◆ The Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), organized, in Lewin's words, to discover "scientific methods of studying and changing group life and the development of concepts and theories of group dynamics" (Morrow 172).

In 1946, the state of Connecticut asked Kurt Lewin to head a two-week workshop on race relations. During the workshop, Lewin and his colleagues Ron Lippitt, Ken Benne, and Lee Bradford developed a form of training which they called the "training group," or "T-group." This method involves forming groups of about 10 participants who learn about group dynamics and processes directly by observing and discussing their own behavior in the group. The concept proved to be a very powerful tool for both learning and behavioral change.

Lewin and his colleagues were excited by the success of the Connecticut workshop and decided to create a regular series of T-groups the following summer. In the midst of their planning, in February 1947, Lewin died. Lippitt, Benne, and Bradford carried on; they secured funding for a new institute, to be known as the National Training Laboratories (NTL), where they could continue developing T-groups. Since then, NTL has become a highly influential research and training organization, and the T-group concept has evolved in many directions, from encounter groups and sensitivity training to many of today's team-building techniques.

Subsequent Development

A serious labor dispute at Standard Oil's Bayway plant in New Jersey set the stage for the first large-scale use of T-group methods in a U.S. corporate setting. In 1958, Robert Blake and Herb Shepard, both members of NTL, were engaged to use T-group techniques with groups of union members and management at Bayway. Their intervention was successful in resolving the labor dispute, and it improved the plant's overall effectiveness. Blake and Shepard reportedly coined the term "organization development" at this time to describe the organizational growth and change resulting from their work.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic in England, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was also engaged in group dynamics research. One of Tavistock's foremost scholars, Eric Trist, was a great admirer of Lewin. He and his colleagues conducted many studies in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, developing the theory that work organizations depended on both social and technical processes. Trist described them as "sociotechnical systems." Trist and colleague Fred Emery also adopted Lewin's concept of organizations as "open systems" which, like living organisms, are interrelated with their environment. Trist believed that to

cope effectively with external changes, an organization must allow its members to create their own self-governing communities within the workplace.

In 1960, MIT professor Douglas McGregor, an admirer and associate of both Lewin and Trist, published a now famous book titled *The Human Side of Enterprise*. McGregor proposed a pair of opposing theories of management based on opposing assumptions about human nature. “Theory X,” as he describes it, holds that humans are inherently passive, self-centered, and indolent, and require active control and management if they are to be productive. “Theory Y” is just the opposite; it holds that humans are inherently motivated to grow and do their best and will be most productive if allowed maximum responsibility for their own work. McGregor argued strongly for Theory Y. He acknowledged the reality of the less-than-ideal behavior on which Theory X is based, but suggested that it is the result of over-controlling management, not the proof of its necessity. He proposed modifying traditional management practices to allow more individual responsibility. By bringing up the subject of underlying assumptions, McGregor also foreshadowed the concept of “corporate culture.”

In the second half of the century, a variety of approaches to organization change emerged. One of these, “participative management,” can be traced back to ideas introduced early in the century by Mary Parker Follett. It also drew on a body of sociotechnical research, including Lester Coch and John French’s classic 1948 study on resistance to change, which showed that the more involved employees are in a change process, the more supportive they will be.

A key figure in the development of the participative management orientation was Rensis Likert. In 1961, Likert published *The Human Organization*, in which he classified management systems into four categories: authoritarian, benevolent, consultative, or participative. In a later book, *New Patterns of Management*, he described in detail how such systems would look in practice. Instead of imposing standards from the top, leaders would create an environment in which groups could set and achieve their own high goals. Communication, support, and respect would be primary values, and mutual influence would foster flexibility and creativity. These concepts have gained wide acceptance as ideals, although they are only more recently beginning to be applied in practice.

Most organization change applications before the 1970s were internally focused, despite the theoretical models of Lewin and others regarding organizations as systems interrelated with their environments. But during the 1970s and 1980s, as organizations faced ever more turbulent social, economic, and technological environments, a broadly strategic orientation to organization change began to emerge. The new strategic orientation placed a greater emphasis on the organization’s relationship with its environment; strategic change involves working towards congruence among an organization’s mission, its structure, culture, and the demands or constraints from outside.

Within the past 25 years, ideas and insights about organization change have proliferated almost exponentially. For instance, a new and popular school has

developed around the concept of organizational or group “culture,” and its effect on organizational success. Others have concentrated on the role of “leadership”—in many forms—as it relates to organization change. Still others are addressing the role of “conflict resolution” and “dialogue” as components of organization change processes. “Teamwork” and “team dynamics” are widely discussed topics. A variety of methods have also been developed for assisting organizations in significant change programs through “interventions” and the use of “change agents,” “facilitators,” or “process consultants.”

These and other recent insights, developments, and contributors will be the subject of future Web-site presentations, leading then to the second syllabus element.

References

- Kleiner, A. 1996. *The Age of Heretics: Heroes, Outlaws, and the Forerunners of Corporate Change*. New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Marrow, A.J. 1969. *The Practical Theorist: The Life and Work of Kurt Lewin*. Annapolis, MD: Basic Books.
- Shafritz, J., and J.S. Ott. 2001. *Classics of Organization Theory*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers.

For recommended readings, refer to the Organization Change section of the Symphony Orchestra Institute’s Web site: < www soi.org > .